

# Bishops, Priests & Magistrates,

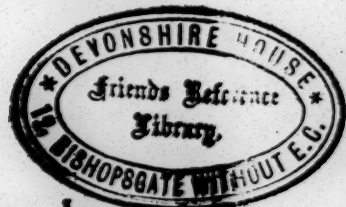
And Others, who have a Hand in Persecuting the

## INNOCENT,

(And yet look to be Excused, because, as they think, they have *Law* for what they do)

For them to VVeigh and Consider in the Fear of God, and then see

*How far they will stand Justified in his Sight.*



**D**O you think it is not hard measure for People to be cast into Prison only for Conscience-sake, and there to be kept Year after Year, and no notice taken of us, except it be to continue us Prisoners? Oh consider! there hath been care taken for the Relief of poor Debtors, but some of the People of God called *Quakers* have been continued Prisoners several Years, and no care taken for our Relief, by any of our Persecutors: Is this to visit Prisoners according to the Mind of Christ? see *Mat. 25*. If those that *will not Feed the Hungry, Cloath the Naked and Visit such Prisoners*, as truly believe in Christ, which he calls *Brethren*, must go into *Everlasting Fire*, prepared for the Devil and his Angels, what will become of those who have a hand in casting into Prison, and intaking that away from such as truly believe in Christ, which should satisfy their Hunger, and cloath their Nakedness? Consider this, ye Persecutors of all sorts; *A Dreadful Day of Vengeance* from the Lord is near to come upon you, except ye Repent and amend your Ways! the Cry of the Oppressed is loud in the Ears of the Lord God of Heaven and Earth! and he will surely visit this Nation of *England* for its Iniquities! He takes what is done unto his People, as done unto himself, whether it be good or evil. Christ said to *Saul* when he was going to *Damascus* to bring such as called upon the Name of the Lord bound to *Jerusalem*, *Saul, Saul, why Persecutest thou me?* [Mark, It was Christ Jesus that *Saul* was Persecuting, although its like he might think, as some do in these days, That he was not persecuting Jesus, but a company of stubborn Fellows that would not obey the Laws, nor satisfy the Wills of the Priests, from whom he had his Letters to persecute, as perhaps some have now.] But further Jesus said, *Is it hard for thee to kick against the Prick?* Take notice of this, ye Persecutors, are ye not sometimes pricked in your Hearts, when ye take our Goods, or cast our Bodies into Prison? and do you not kick against it, and make merry over that in your selves, which witnesses against you, and bolster up your selves with the Law? but certainly the Law will not excuse you. *Paul*, as touching the Law, said, *He walked Blameless*; which is more than many of our Persecutors do now adays; yet he was a Persecutor (and a Consentor to the Death of that blessed Martyr *Stephen*) a Blasphemer and the chief of Sinners! *O wretched man that I am!* said he, *who shall deliver me from this Body of Sin and Death?* He was delivered, but not whilst he followed, and sought to keep favour with the Priests; *It was the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus*, which made him free from the Law of Sin and Death, and then they hated him, and persecuted him also: But I would not be mis-understood, for the Law which is for the punishment of Evil-doers, and the Praise of them that do well, we dearly own and obey, and the rest we suffer under, without seeking Revenge; but the heavenly God is angry with all such who make use of Laws to Spoil their Neighbours Goods, and cast their Bodies into Prison, which were not made or intended against them, as is manifest at this time in *England*; there is no People in the Nation more clear in Judgment and Practice against Popery, than we who are called *Quakers*; and yet it is known to the Lord and many People, how greatly many of us have and do Suffer by Laws made only against them, and also by an Act made in latter Years, by which our Goods are spoiled by wicked Informers, for our peaceable Meeting together to Worship God; I say, God is Angry with all such that cause People to suffer for the Exercise of their tender Consciences to him; and it will not be washing of their hands, *Pilate-like*, and saying, *It is not them, but the Law, by which we suffer*, that will excuse them; the Jews pleaded Law against Christ, but will any Christian say, *they were Excusable because of that?* no such matter: If they had rightly understood the Law, or had not been wilfully blind, they might have seen that the Law took no hold of Christ Jesus, being Innocent; but their Envy blinded their Eyes, so that they chose to have *Barabas* released, who for certain Insurrection made in the City, and for Murder was cast into Prison, and the Son of God they would have crucified, saying, with one accord, *Away with him*. And oh that none may be of their minds in *England*! who made the Innocent to suffer, and let the Guilty go free.

But some may Object, and say, *The Law is plain for the Payment of Tythes, for Swearing before a Magistrate, and for Going to Church, and you Quakers will do none of these, which is a great Cause of your Sufferings now.*

Well, as to these Particulars there hath been so many faithful Testimonies born, both in Sufferings, Words and Writings, which one would think might

have convinced our Persecutors, if they had not wilfully shut their Eyes and stoped their Ears; therefore I shall only make a short Reply for the clearing of my self.

And first, as touching *Tythes*, its true, they were commanded in the time of the *Levitical Law*; but Christ Jesus was and is the End of that Law, for Righteousness-sake to every one that believes; and he sent his Ministers to preach Freely; and the Apostle saith in *Heb. 7*. *There is a disannulling of the Commandment going before, for the Weakness and Unprofitableness thereof: And the Priesthood being Changed, saith he, there is of Necessity a Change of the Law.* So its plain they were Ended by Christ, and were brought up again in the Mid-night of *Darkness and Popery*; and since have been a very great Oppression; and God hath required us to bear our Testimonies against them, for which many of us have suffered great Spoiling of our Goods, and some Imprisonment till Death, in nasty Holes; and many are Prisoners at this time, as Witnesses against them.

And as concerning *Swearing*, I have this to say, and that from the Lord God, That there is no Safety to any Magistrate or People in Oathes; and the Lord, whose Command all the Swearers break, will make the Sons of men to know it in his own time; and if they did not wilfully shut their Eyes, they might have some sight of it already; for how often have some of the People of *England* Sworn too and again, sometimes One Way, and sometimes Another? notwithstanding our Lord and Master Christ Jesus saith, *Swear Not at all*; and the Apostle *James* saith, *Above all things my Brethren Swear not*; and the Prophet saith, *Because of Swearing the Land Mourns*; and so doth this Land, and will more and more, if this Yoke of Oppression be not taken off the Neck of the Oppressed, who deny Swearing for no other end, but for Conscience-sake, it being a Breach of the Command of Christ, and have more regard to their Words, than many have to their Oaths.

And as concerning *Going to Church*, as it is called; The Church which is in God, the Pillar and Ground of Truth, we dearly own and joyn unto; and we do Worship God in Spirit and Truth, which is the Worship that Christ Jesus set up above Sixteen Hundred Years ago: And we think it hard Measure, that we should be made to suffer so deeply by long Imprisonments and Spoiling of our Goods, for so long warranted a Practice, especially by such who seem to pray for the same themselves, as may be seen at large in the Book of *Common-Prayer*; but surely the Law will not excuse our Persecutors before the great God of Heaven and Earth; therefore, Oh that they would lay it to heart, and cease fighting against him, for he will be too hard for them! The Day hastens that he will Avenge the Sufferings of his People; he sees what Snares are laid for the Innocent, and how Mischief is hatched upon the Beds of the Ungodly, and what Wickedness is daily acted in the Streets, both of great Towns and Villages, in Sports and Playes; and he also sees what is done in secret; Oh! therefore, Repent, Repent in time, you that have any Tenderness or Remorse upon your Spirits! Turn to the Lord, that he may heal you and gather you into his heavenly Ark, where the Safety only is; for a Day of Sorrow and Trouble draws near to come upon all the Ungodly, and many Warnings you have had: Oh! how large hath the Love of God been to this Nation! How often hath he discovered the Wickedness of the Wicked, who have sought its Ruin, and hath given you space to Repent, as well as a sight of your Enemies? Therefore do not make the Innocent to suffer, but cease to do Evil, and learn to do Well, that the Lord may shew Mercy unto you, and gather you under the Shadow of his Heavenly Wings, that ye may be Nourished and Sheltered from the Devourer.

*Thus far I have cleared my self of that which for some time hath lain upon me, who am a Lover of Truth, and yet continued a Prisoner for it, with Fourteen more of my Suffering Brethren.*

The 22<sup>d</sup> of the 3<sup>d</sup> Month,  
1680.

John Willsford.